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ABSTRACT

This monograph deals with situations in which an intern must be withdrawn from teacher education. It is about those who, for whatever reasons, are not suited to be teachers. Withdrawal from internship represents a major adjustment in career orientation and is intertwined with one's confidence and feelings of worth. The manner in which this process is handled is critical in helping to re-adjust personal and professional goals. Six stages in the process of withdrawing interns from the practicum are described (identification, analysis, indecision, recognition, acceptance, and adjustment). The challenge for the college supervisor and/or cooperating teacher is to ensure that the intern is able to move through each of these stages. The role of the program is to help an intern perceive withdrawal from a positive perspective. Two diametrically opposed concerns, the welfare of pupils versus the welfare of the intern are considered. Several arguments to utilize in the withdrawal process are presented, and two arguments which are not justifiable and that basically give the welfare of the intern priority over the welfare of the students, are also discussed. Guidelines and considerations based on a rational and sensitive approach can result in an intern's positive feelings of new realizations and growth. (Author/LL)

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Abstract

Stages in the process of withdrawing interns from the practicum are described. The role of the program is to help an intern who must withdraw from the practicum to perceive withdrawal from a positive perspective. Two diametically opposed concerns: the welfare of students versus the welfare of the intern are considered. Several arguments to utilize in the withdrawal process are described, including two arguments which are not justifiable. Guidelines and considerations based on a rationale and sensitive approach can result in an intern's positive feelings of new realizations and growth.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR...

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Procedures in the Withdrawal from the Practicum in Teacher Education

Don C. Barnett

My first experience with a withdrawal from the teacher education practicum occurred during my own student teaching as an undergraduate. In those days, we were paired with a cooperating teacher. My partner's problems with discipline and instructional organization combined with a non-assertive classroom manner were obvious. During one of his painfully inadequate lessons, our college supervisor appeared at the door. Partway through the lesson, the college supervisor rose to his feet and announced "Excuse me class, Mr. X is coming with me now. Your (cooperating) teacher will continue with the remainder of the lesson." My partner walked out the door and out of my life forever. I never saw him again, and it was several years before I finally allayed my suspicions that he must have been devoured by the college supervisor.

This monograph is not about "saving" an intern. It is not about ways to work and help an individual achieve his aspiration to become a teacher. In contrast, it is about dealing with those relatively few but critically important situations in which an intern must be withdrawn from teacher education. It is about those who, for whatever reasons, are not suited to be teachers. Regardless of the reasons — all of which must be valid — the end result is the same. For the sake of the individual himself/herself, other teachers, the teaching profession, and most of all for unsuspecting students who might inherit this person as their teacher for a course or for a year, the conclusion is the same. This person must be withdrawn from the practicum.

Withdrawal from internship represents a major adjustment in career orientation, and is intertwined with one's confidence and feelings of worth. This adjustment can be destructive to self-esteem or it can result in feelings of a new realization and acceptance of an alternative career orientation. The manner in which this process is handled is critical in helping someone re-adjust their personal and professional goals.

STAGES OF AWARENESS

Withdrawal from internship seldom is a sudden event. It is a process, and recognizing the process toward withdrawal can help the teacher and college supervisor in guiding the intern down this potentially treacherous but mandatory path.

The following chart identifies stages of awareness on the part of an intern who needs to be withdrawn from the internship program. The challenge for the college supervisor and/or cooperating teacher is to ensure that the intern is able to move through each of these stages.

STAGES OF INTERN AWARENESS IN HE WITHDRAWAL FROM INTERNSHIP

I	II	III
IDENTIFICATION STAGE Identification of specific problem areas	ANALYSIS STAGE A. A focus on an issue or contextual analysis, or B. Practice of the Supervision Cycle with specific and targeted written data collection.	INDECISION STAGE Awareness that improvement is not occurring.
IV	**V**	**VI**
RECOGNITION STAGE Recognition that the teaching Performance is not adequate. The transition to the acceptance stage occurs quickly.	ACCEPTANCE STAGE Acceptance that withdrawal from internship will occur.	ADJUSTMENT STAGE Realization that alternatives are available, and are more desirable. Development of a personal plan for the immediate and/or long-range future.

If the stage in which the intern currently is at can be determined by the college supervisor or cooperating teacher, it can provide some guidance in focusing discussions with the intern in order to move the intern to the next stage in the process. During the initial two stages there is a reasonable chance that the intern may not need to withdraw from internship. However, if stage two — analysis — indicates an unsatisfactory performance, then a reversal

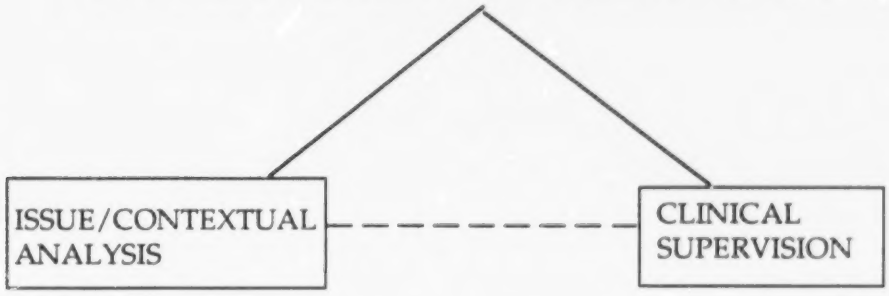
in the process is unlikely. After this point the job of the college supervisor and/or cooperating teacher is to move the intern through the remaining stages in the process as quickly and humanely as possible.

The time factor is important. The intern should not be unduly rushed. On the other hand, the time should not drag on for numerous weeks with the intern being forced to live on false hope until time runs out at the end of the internship period.

The identification stage needs to occur early after numerous attempts in teaching by the intern has occurred. Student reactions to the intern usually are important signals at this stage. The college supervisor and/or cooperating teacher perceive that the teaching performance has been unsatisfactory. Little or no progress has occurred.

The analysis stage is critical in the decision-making process. Time still exists for the intern to rise to greater heights and to succeed, even though major teaching problems have been clearly identified. This analysis should occur along one of two dimensions: an issue/contextual analysis or analysis via the principles of clinical supervision. My suggestion is to conduct both forms of analyses — the issue/contextual analysis first, then the analysis via clinical supervision (as indicated by the dotted line in the diagram below). However, individual and unique factors may dictate that only one of the analytical approaches should be taken.

APPROACHES TO SUPERVISION IN THE ANALYSIS STAGE



The strength of the issue/contextual approach is that it focuses concern or even blame on the situation rather than on the individual which is more likely to occur in the clinical supervision approach. The problem lies with the issue or context of the teaching situation. For example, the supervisor would focus on the problem as being a curriculum problem, an "organization of difficult content" problem, a student problem due to peer influence or home background, or a learning problem of the student. As the identified issue or context from a broader dimension is analyzed, the teacher-intern pair decide upon what needs to be done to rectify the issue or problem. Again, focus is on the problem, not the individual performance of the intern.

In contrast, the clinical supervision approach places the focus on the individual intern and his/her specific teaching behaviors. Focus and responsibility, and even a sense of blame, falls upon the shoulders of the intern. The problem and its potential solution is a result of the intern's personal teaching performance, and it is only through adjustment and correction of specific teaching behaviors and procedures that an acceptable level of teaching performance can be achieved. This approach has the advantage of being diagnostic and clear, but it adds pressure to an already struggling intern. If the intern responds in specific ways, the practicum becomes successful. If the intern not, withdrawal from the practicum must be the only responsible alternative.

In this latter approach to the analysis stage, adherence to the strict guidelines of

clinical supervision and the supervision cycle with its focus on one specific aspect of the intern's teaching behavior with written data becomes critical. The intern needs to work on one aspect of his/her teaching at a time in order to attempt to improve a single teaching competency before moving to develop another. A selected teaching behavior is clearly identified. An acceptable minimum performance level is determined. Often a "contract" is agreed upon by the teacher and intern. For example, a contract might indicate that nine students were inattentive during a teaching demonstration and by adhering to selected teaching procedures in the next lesson, a minimum of only one (or two) off-task students will be observed to achieve a satisfactory level of instruction.

Interns often experience a great deal of anxiety in the indecision stage (Stage III). Feedback has drawn unsatisfactory conclusions. Teaching performance has not improved satisfactorily. Student behavior may have deteriorated. Alternative teaching approaches have been attempted without any particular success and additional options appear exhausted. The intern may choose to remain in the indecision stage for a prolonged period of time. He/she may choose to "wait it out" until the argument may become more justifiable that it is too late, and now unfair, to require a non-pass conclusion to internship. During the first three stages the intern has the opportunity to realize that teaching may not be his/her best choice of career. In the last three stages the decision to withdraw from internship has been made by the college teacher and cooperating teacher, and this information needs to be clearly communicated to the intern at the outset of stage IV. Once an intern reaches the acceptance and adjustment stages (Stages V and VI), the role of the college supervisor and the program focuses on personal counselling and the role of the cooperating teacher usually diminishes quickly.

Although the intern may have reached the acceptance stage, the withdrawal process is yet incomplete. Assistance is needed to help the intern adjust to a new personal dimension in Stage VI. The intern may be referred to personal counselling, program counselling, and career counselling services which should be in every teacher education program of high quality. Advice to attend selected courses may be given. The program has

a responsibility to help the intern make some adjustment from pursuing a career in teaching. If the intern is able to reach the final stage — adjustment, the chances of him/her perceiving the internship as a learning experience and maintaining his/her self-esteem is high. Short range plans such as going home, waiting for a new semester, looking at courses in a new program, or finding a job need to be made. Students who withdraw can be helped to consider long-range plans such as enrolling in a new program or trying a new career.

A Final Note on the Sequence of Stages: the six stages are presented in a linear sequence for clarity. While it is true that in most instances the pattern of intern awareness occurs in this sequence, some overlapping between stages may occur. For example, the analysis stage may continue into the indecision stage on the part of the intern. Also, it may be advisable at times to introduce the adjustment stage to the intern while he/she is in stages III or IV. The intern tends to reject thoughts of withdrawal until some consideration for alternatives has occurred. Once some visible alternatives have been considered, acceptance of withdrawal usually becomes more acceptable.

ALTERNATE PRINCIPLES IN THE WITHDRAWAL PROCESS

In addition to written feedback on the intern's unsatisfactory teaching performance, several arguments for consideration ought to be presented to the intern. These arguments are centered around two principles involving students and the intern. Consideration of these two principles help the intern move from a stage of recognition toward a stage of acceptance.

Withdrawal from internship involves diametrically opposed concerns: the welfare of students versus the welfare of the intern. A superficial perspective perceives withdrawal as a simple choice between these two concerns — a more adequate perspective provides a bridge between them.

A. The Welfare of the Intern

This principle mandates that the intern must be seen as an individual with certain rights, including the right to develop his/her teaching skills and pursue a career of

personal choice. Time, goals, and aspirations have been invested in the culminating experience of internship. Every individual has something to offer others, and these positive attributes need to be recognized. The primary role of the college supervisor and cooperating teacher is to help the intern in every way possible. The intern is the focus and purpose of the entire internship experience.

B. The Welfare of Students

This principle mandates that the ultimate perception of the situation must focus on the school student. This is what professionalism is all about. The bottom line in internship — and the entire exercise of teaching — is to do what is best for students, not what is best for adults, schools, the administration, or teachers. All these essential groups take a secondary role to that of the student. The decision to withdraw from internship must be based on what is best for students. To permit an inadequate teacher to influence the learning and attitudes of youngsters as they grow through their school years is morally wrong, particularly when the opportunity to turn away such potential "teachers" is available. Yes, interns have rights, but so do students.

C. Bridging the Gap

Withdrawal from internship ought to address the needs of both students and the intern. It is not a simple choice between intern and students. Withdrawal means that students will not be exposed to an inadequate teacher for the remainder of this year, or for years to come.

A critical task for the college supervisor, cooperating teacher, and/or the internship office is to help the intern perceive withdrawal from internship in a positive perspective. Once the intern has been made aware of the positive aspects of withdrawing, the focus of the counselling ought to move immediately to stage VI — considering alternatives and a personal plan for the future.

ARGUMENTS FOR WITHDRAWAL

In counselling an intern to perceive withdrawal in a positive manner, the following arguments might be presented.

1. Internship is a time of career exploration rather than a time for a "make it or break it" run. Interns are exploring job possibilities and should not feel bad or guilty that they have discovered that this particular job is not for them. Not "buying" into a job should not make one feel any more guilty than not buying a coat after trying one on for size at a store. Regardless of the outcome, internship should be viewed as a learning experience and a person is richer because of participating in that experience.
2. Everyone needs to have an alternative goal(s) rather than simply one goal in life. Although it is desirable to have a clearly defined goal, and to work conscientiously toward that goal, it is still possible to have another goal(s) in mind in the event that the first priority goal does not work out. Withdrawal from internship can provide time for reflection on alternatives.
3. By this point, the intern probably has experienced a great deal of pressure and stress. Withdrawal can be a welcome relief. Few people enjoy high stress, and few would prefer to have it continue indefinitely. Taking time to re-group is welcomed once the intern has internalized the insurmountable problems associated with this particular internship experience.
4. Teaching today's youngsters can be a very difficult job. Teachers are being asked to look after the community's children when the community itself cannot do the job adequately in many instances. Just because a person cannot look after the community's children and their many complex problems is no disgrace for any individual.
5. "Why stay for a marginal pass mark in a competitive job market?" is a question to pose for consideration. Note that, statistically, second time interns often experience success. For some, time to re-group and begin in a new situation in another term can

make the difference between failure and success. Success in terms of a minimal level evaluation for teaching can be hardly judged as success. Success should be regarded in terms of a positive evaluation which will be an asset when applying for a teaching position

6. Staying in teaching may be the easier solution and it is sometimes weaker individuals who have succumbed to this choice. It requires a stronger person to face up to the real situation and say "I learned from this, and I'm big enough and strong enough to not permit this kind of thing to continue. I made the choice to change." An intern who can say this has achieved a positive feeling about exercising control over his/her own destiny, regardless of what others — family, friends — might think. In the end, the final decision was their decision — no one else's — and that decision was based on what was best for them.

TWO UNACCEPTABLE ARGUMENTS

The argument described under the section "The Welfare of the Intern" is not a justification to permit entry into the teaching profession. Teaching is about helping others, not injuring them. As noted in the subsequent argument under "The Welfare of Students", students must be the ultimate focus for decision-making concerning the withdrawal of an intern. Frequently this focus is difficult to see or accept by a teacher who has worked closely under the original guidelines from the practicum to be humanistic and collaborative in their working relationship with their intern. This is the time in which the college supervisor must play a supportive and guiding role in helping the cooperating teacher accommodate a difficult situation. To succumb to the position that the individual needs of the intern should take precedence over the needs of school children can not occur in a responsible practicum.

A second unjustifiable argument occasionally arises. This position is as follows: A passing grade is a degree requirement; therefore, let's pass the intern with the understanding that he/she will never teach. Such thinking is akin to selling arms to a dictator and expecting him/her to use them only in particular ways. Passing the internship, provided the

necessary courses are completed, in effect means teacher certification. The "welfare of the intern" and "passing but not teaching" arguments have resulted in some individuals entering the teaching profession when they should not have done so — for their own sake as well as for that of unsuspecting students who will inherit them as teachers over the following years and decades.

CONCLUSION

The intern who has withdrawn from internship needs to feel that the university and its internship program still supports him/her as an individual and that some communication is still available even after the basic counselling process has been completed. Withdrawal does not mean abandonment; rather withdrawal is a growing process. Perceived and handled in this way, withdrawal from internship can be seen as a meaningful learning experience by the intern. Also, the college supervisor and cooperating teacher will have positive feelings for helping someone arrive at this realization while making a most valuable contribution to the teaching profession.